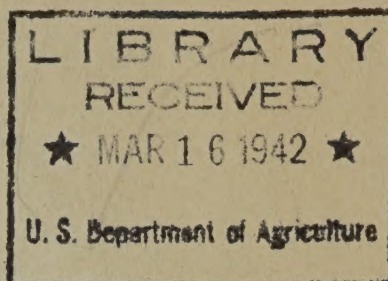


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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

U.S. Bureau of Agricultural Economics



RURAL MANPOWER AND WAR PRODUCTION

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Conrad Taeuber  
Senior Social Scientist  
Bureau of Agricultural Economics

Testimony given before the Select Committee  
Investigating National Defense Migration

Washington, D. C.  
February 13, 1942



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ANNUAL REPORT AND THE YEAR

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to the Secretary of Agriculture  
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Areas of population pressure are areas of potential war workers, workers needed to meet the wartime goals of agricultural and industrial production.

The situation was similar in World War I. With proper guidance, the reservoir of manpower in rural problem areas can make a contribution to the labor needed in the present emergency. When foreign immigration ceased with the outbreak of that war, rural areas supplied many of the workers needed for an expanding industry. The export of considerable numbers of people to cities in all parts of the Nation continued for a decade after the end of that war. The depression of the 1930's brought about a decline in the rate of migration away from farms, but did not alter the rate at which young people were reaching maturity. In addition, there was some migration to farms, especially those in which land for subsistence purposes might be occupied at very little cost. This damming up of population, coupled with the decline of timber resources and of soil fertility, as well as with reductions in the crops which had been the traditional mainstays, made many areas "problems" in the fullest sense of the term.

Relief and public works programs were stop-gaps. The possibilities of rural rehabilitation were limited by the lack of sufficient good land and by the low level of skills of many of the residents. But these areas continued to produce manpower and are still doing so. As full employment is approached, the unused or inefficiently used manpower in these rural problem areas may become an important element in total production.

The ineffectively used manpower is found on farms of very low productivity. For the Nation as a whole, the 1940 Census reports show a large number of farms which produced only a small volume of products and contributed only a small part of the total agricultural product in 1939. Two million farms reported a gross value of all products sold, traded, or used of less than \$400; almost 4 million reported products valued at less than \$1,000. (Table 1.)

Table 1.- Farms classified by value of products, 1939

Value of product groups:	Number of farms	Value of product	Average value: per farm	Percent of total	
	:(Thousands)	(Millions)		Number	Value
\$ 0 - 399	2,055	\$ 423	\$ 206	33.9	5.4
400 - 999	1,924	1,245	647	31.8	15.9
1,000 - 1,499	709	866	1,222	11.7	11.1
1,500 - 9,999	1,311	3,939	3,005	21.6	50.4
10,000 & over	58	1,341	22,989	1.0	17.2
Total	6,057	7,814	1,290	100.0	100.0

Source: U. S. Census of Agriculture, 1940

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In an analysis of these figures Ellickson and Brewster point out that the first group, that with value of product less than \$400, represents to a large extent families which obtain the major portion of their income from sources other than agriculture, as well as those in which the farm operator is unable to perform full time work because of age or physical or other handicaps.

Disregarding these establishments they then examine the possibility of producing the Nation's agricultural products on family-size farms. For this purpose they assume that the number of large-scale farms, those with a gross value of product of \$10,000 and over, will remain unchanged and that their share of the total production will remain unchanged. They show then that if all other farms could achieve a level of production equal to the average of those reporting \$1,500 - \$9,999 for 1939 the total volume of production could be achieved on 2,000,000 farms. Thus a reduction of 2,000,000 farms would be possible if these assumptions were met. Obviously such a change could not occur at once, and some of the farm operators affected by such a program would be needed on the more productive farms as laborers. But the conclusion is inescapable, that in 1939, just as in 1929, the farm plant of the Nation included a large number of persons who were on units which did not provide an efficient utilization of the manpower on them and which did not yield the inhabitants an adequate living. Many of them lack the resources, the land, the machinery, the livestock and work stock, the credit, or the skills to take full advantage of improved farm prices. Unless programs to assist these farm families to meet these needs are expanded, many of them can make only a very modest contribution to the food for victory program. A nation at war can use a large part of this manpower more effectively than on relatively unproductive farm units.

The inefficiently utilized manpower is concentrated to a large extent in the problem areas in agriculture. Using a number of factors relating to agricultural conditions, some 769 counties, about one-fourth of all counties, were classified as problem counties. They are concentrated chiefly in the Southern and Southeastern States; in six of these they constitute the majority of all of the counties of the State and in three others a large proportion. In Texas, 65 counties, located chiefly in the southeastern portion of the State, are included.

These are the counties in which the factors making for poverty and distress are not primarily the result of some disaster, such as flood or drought, but are rather the result of long continued trends. In 1937, the Census of Unemployment found 41 percent of all men in rural farm areas who were unemployed or working on emergency projects in those counties. They are the counties in which the present need for workers may be the stimulus for the development of necessary long-time adjustments, if it is possible to find ways of fitting their manpower into productive enterprises under conditions which will prove attractive to them. This may mean migration out of these areas; it may also mean the development of industrial employment opportunities in or near these areas.

The contribution of these areas to the total agricultural production is relatively small. In 1940, these 769 counties included 39 percent of all the farms and approximately one-third of all the farm people in the country. They had one-third of all farm land and 26 percent of the land in crops in 1939. The contribution they make to the total agricultural production may be shown by reference to some specific products.



The 1940 Census reports that their farms had 15 percent of all cattle, and 20 percent of all hogs. They reported only 8 percent of all milk produced in 1939, 12 percent of the eggs, and 11 percent of the cattle sold. Their contribution to other crops was no greater - they reported 12 percent of the acreage in hay, 25 percent of the total corn acreage, and 13 percent of the corn harvested. Their contribution of fruits and vegetables to the total production of the Nation was very small. But they produced 25 percent of the tobacco and 62 percent of the cotton.

The fact that contribution to total agricultural production is less than their share of the farm population was not a result of adverse factors in 1939. Productivity had long been low, as is shown by the fact that the total value of farm land and buildings represented only 21 percent of that reported for the entire nation. They had never been able to build up their productivity to a point where a program like that of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration was able to render a great deal of assistance. During the years 1936-37 they accounted for only 22 percent of the AAA payments.

It is true that many of the families carrying on farming in these areas also have the head of the family reporting some other occupation. Approximately one-eighth of the farm operators in these counties reported working 100 days or more off their farms in 1939; this is 31 percent of all farmers in the country who reported so much off the farm work. Altogether they accounted for 23 percent of the total work off the farm. But even with this combination of nonfarm work, including WPA in recent years, they have not been able to secure levels of income which meet any of the standards of adequacy. Levels of living are low, as levels of income have been low.

In short, these counties are areas from which workers can be recruited for the Nation's total agricultural and industrial production without impairing its agricultural effort. These counties include many highly productive and efficiently managed farms and many farms which require laborers in addition to those in the farmer's family. But on the whole, soil and farm management experts have long pointed out that the best use of the lands of these areas would require a reduction in the land under cultivation. If desirable alternative opportunities are available, a partial withdrawal of the farm population now in the areas, as well as of the rural nonfarm population there now, would probably be beneficial to those who remained as well as to those leaving.

If the manpower now available in these areas is to be effectively utilized in the more productive agricultural enterprises or in industry, training programs must be developed. In fact, a lack of training and experience has proven a handicap to the young people from these areas in the competition for jobs. This was especially true during the 1930's when the competition for jobs was intense. It is a major element in the holding back of rural young people in rural problem areas.

The meager training facilities available to youth in rural problem areas are apparent from the school statistics. These counties account for approximately one-sixth of all the children enrolled in the public schools of the country, but for only about one-thirtieth of the funds spent for public schools. Many of the children in school do not complete even the basic curriculum of eight grades, let alone high school. Recent studies at the



University of North Carolina indicate that for the Southeastern States the average child entering school may expect to drop out before completing the sixth grade, and in many counties the average is considerably less. The proportion of children in the first and second grades of the school system is an indication of the retardation which is common. Tennessee includes 44 of these problem counties and in 30 of them more than 33 percent of the children in the public schools in 1936-37 were in the first and second grades. Similarly, in 50 of the 57 problem counties in Alabama, more than 33 percent of all the children in the public schools were in the first and second grades; but in Arkansas 20 of the 56 problem counties reported so large a proportion (1937-38). These figures apply to the school systems of the entire counties, rural and urban. The extent of retardation in school is undoubtedly higher in the rural than in the urban parts and in the farm than in the village parts of these counties. The figures for some of these counties are affected by the inclusion of Negroes, but many of the counties that have only a small proportion of Negroes reported that more than one-third of all the children in the public schools were in the first and second grades. Under such conditions, completion of the fifth grade represents a high level of achievement, and completion of the eighth grade is exceptional. The figures for the Southeast indicate that of the total of 1,450,000 children who entered school in 1936, 50 percent would get to the fourth grade, 33 percent to the seventh, and barely 16 percent to the eleventh year, which in some places is the last year of high school. Nearly half of the white children but only one-sixth of the Negro children 1/ would reach the seventh grade. These figures apply to rural and urban schools; in general, conditions in rural areas are even less favorable. A survey in 1935 found that in the Eastern Cotton Belt nearly half the 16-17 year olds in rural white families had not gone beyond the seventh grade, but half the Negroes had completed only a little more than the third grade. In the Appalachian-Ozark area half the 16-17 year olds had barely completed the seventh grade. 2/

Irregular attendance, poorly equipped schools, inadequately trained teachers, short terms, and curricula having very little relation to the everyday lives of the pupils were factors in the limited schooling. In some of these areas, graduation from the fifth or sixth grade represented an achievement more exceptional than graduation from high school in some of the more prosperous rural areas. The studies of the American Youth Commission have shown abundantly that training of this type is not the kind of training needed to cope with the complexities of modern agriculture or industry.

The schools provide only part of the training which an adult needs in the modern world. But the situation with reference to things normally learned out of school is no better. For many of the children growing up in the rural problem areas the requirements of the complex modern industrial world and the requirements of efficient commercial agriculture are relatively unfamiliar. The farms of these counties reported only 7 percent of the tractors and 13 percent of the automobiles on farms in 1940. And altogether the farms in these counties reported only 11 percent of the farm machinery expense of all farmers in 1939. Obviously, their farm workers have not had occasion to work with modern farm machinery and equipment to any great extent.

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1/Proceedings of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology Conference of North Carolina State College, Raleigh, N. C. June 23-27, 1941, p. 82.

2/Mangus, A. R. Changing aspects of rural relief. Res. Mono. XIV. WPA Division of Social Research, Washington, D. C. p. 84, 1938.



It is not an exaggeration to say that they have also had very little opportunity to learn about or put into practice many of the principles of modern scientific agriculture. They have not met them in practice and their educational background has not been sufficient to permit them to take advantage of the numerous publications with which better educated farm people do keep up-to-date.

Moreover, the younger generation of these areas has lived without many of the facilities which large portions of our urban populations take for granted. Only 12 percent of the homes of farm operators in these counties are lighted by electricity; running water in the home is almost entirely absent. Newspapers and magazines which carry news of the modern world to many parts of the country are much less common than in the economically more favored areas.

The lack of formal training and experience is not a measure of lack of intelligence. Given the opportunity, the men and women from these areas could acquire necessary knowledge and skills to fit into the current labor market. Experience has shown that they quickly become efficient workers. During the 1920's these areas supplied a large part of the workers needed in the rapidly expanding automobile industry. More recently the experience of war industry plants which have tapped the labor reserves of some of these areas has indicated that given proper training and supervision the recruits from these areas quickly become competent and efficient workers.

The recruiting of manpower from these rural problem areas to supply the needs of war production would be in accord with the basic trends in farm population, for the farms consistently produce a greater number of young persons than are needed for replacement of their population. During the 1920's the farms of the Nation contributed 6 million persons net to non-farm areas. Many of them were young people who entered manufacturing and clerical occupations. During the previous decade, the contribution was also about 6 million persons, bringing the total for the two decades to 12 million persons. But this contribution meant a decrease of only about 2 million; the remainder was accounted for by the excess of births over deaths. During the decade following 1929, the net migration from farms was less than it had been during either of the two preceding 10-year periods, amounting to only about 3,500,000 persons. This was approximately equal to the excess of births over deaths, with the result that the number of persons living on farms in 1940 was the same as it had been in 1930. During each of the two previous decades there had actually been a decline.

But although the number of persons living on farms was the same in 1940 as in 1930, there was an increase in the number of persons of working age. An increase in the number of persons over 20 years of age was offset by a decrease in the number under 20. There was a decrease of almost 1,400,000 in the number of persons under 20, but an increase of nearly 1,000,000 in the number of persons of working age (20-64) and an increase of 400,000 in the number of persons 65 years old and over. The increase in the working age group amounted to 592,000 for men and 394,000 for women. Available data do not yet indicate to what extent this increase in the number of persons of working age living on farms represents persons directly available for farm work, or persons who are living on farms but working at some nonagricultural occupation. Estimates of farm employment indicate a decrease in the number of hired laborers and the number of family workers in agriculture during the decade. But in 1940 there were also 850,000 persons on farms who were employed on emergency projects or looking for work.



The fact that birth rates in rural areas, and especially in the farm population, have been high in the past is reflected now in the numbers of persons reaching working age, and thus becoming available to the labor force. For the entire country, it is estimated that the population of working age, 20-64, will increase by 7,000,000 persons between 1940 and 1950, if there is no net migration from or to foreign countries. Of this total 3,227,000 will be men, virtually all of whom will become available to the labor force. But the rural farm population, which included less than one-fourth of the population in 1940 will contribute nearly one-half of this total increase in the working age population. Their total is nearly 3,000,000 persons of whom 1,417,000 are men. In other words, between 1940 and 1950 some 3,400,000 young men now living on farms will have reached their 20th birthday. This is approximately 340,000 per year. They will replace approximately 200,000 losses in the age group 20-64 due to death or superannuation. If the present number of persons of working age on farms were to remain constant between 1940 and 1950 there would be available for migration from farms annually 140,000 young men and approximately the same number of young women.

From the standpoint of the young people themselves the situation may be stated that for every 100 vacancies created by death or superannuation some 180 young men are entering the working age group. In the South, generally, the number of farm boys reaching maturity is at least twice as great as the number of older men who die or reach retirement age.

For the rural areas of the South, farm and nonfarm combined, during the 10 years 1940-50 there will be an excess of 3,000,000 men and women reaching working age above those needed for replacement.

But if the working age population in 1940 is not effectively employed in agriculture, and the figures on productivity of many farms show clearly that that is the case, then the numbers above replacement needs represent only a part of the numbers available for nonfarm activities. As a minimum, it would appear that the numbers of persons employed on emergency work, plus those seeking work in the rural farm population would have been available as of April 1940, and that in addition the annual increment of nearly 300,000 young people above replacement needs would be available also. If, in addition, some reorganization of the farm plant could be achieved to make the continuation of the least productive farms unnecessary from the standpoint of agricultural production, the number of workers so released for nonagricultural production might be increased accordingly. A definite figure cannot be given now, since it would require taking into account the seasonal fluctuation of employment in agriculture, which involves both unpaid family labor and hired labor, and the extent of migration since the Census was taken in April 1940.

Former farm workers who had moved to nearby villages before 1940 also constitute a great reservoir of ineffectively utilized manpower. In some predominantly agricultural areas there was a decrease in the farm population, but an increase in the rural nonfarm population. Such a transfer of population, in the absence of the development of new occupational outlets, involved primarily a shifting in the location of unemployed and underemployed workers. For the country as a whole the number of persons of working age on farms increased by nearly 1,000,000, but in the rural nonfarm population the increase was 2,544,000. In rural nonfarm areas the number of persons on emergency work or seeking work in April 1940 was



nearly 1,700,000. What part of this population would become available for nonagricultural employment cannot be definitely stated at the present time, but there can be no doubt that this group also represents a reservoir of manpower which can be drawn upon.

The situation in the agricultural problem counties for which data were given above is indicative of the developments which occurred. For the entire group of counties there was virtually no change in the number of people living on farms. But in these same counties the rural population as a whole increased by 766,000 or 5.6 percent. Virtually all of this increase was in the rural nonfarm population which increased about 17 percent, slightly more than the national average for rural nonfarm areas. Part of this increase resulted from the transfer of persons no longer needed in the local agriculture to the nearby villages and small towns. In some States both farm and nonfarm population in these problem counties increased - in Kentucky the farm population of these counties increased by 14 percent and the rural nonfarm population at the same rate; in Tennessee the increase of the rural farm population was 7 percent and that of the rural nonfarm 13 percent; and in New Mexico it was 12 percent for the rural farm and 8.5 percent for rural nonfarm. In North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas where farm population in these problem counties decreased, the increases in the rural nonfarm more than offset these losses and there were increases in the rural population as a whole. In Colorado, Kansas and Oregon these problem counties experienced losses in both the rural farm and the rural nonfarm population. In the majority of cases in which the rural farm population decreased, the nearby rural nonfarm population increased. Thus a part of the decline of farm population was simply a shift in residence. The workers involved had not left the county.

Since April 1940 there has been a great deal of migration, as the hearings before this Committee have amply demonstrated. Undoubtedly some of the figures based on 1940 Census materials are somewhat out of date, just how much so cannot be determined. Estimates made in the Department of Agriculture indicate that there has been a considerable increase in the movement from farms above the levels reported during the depression years. But the evidence which has been accumulating shows that the migration which has occurred has not yet reached very far into the rural problem areas. The evidence from the surveys made by the Works Project Administration in a number of defense centers indicates that the migrations into them had been primarily from urban areas. Most of the rural migrants had come from villages; the proportion coming from the open country was very small. The reports further indicate that few of the migrants traveled far: in most instances the average distance was less than 125 miles.

Another indication of the relatively smaller amount of migration from rural problem areas is found in the experience of the Farm Security Administration. That agency has been keeping records which show the number of borrower families who have left farming for other occupations. These records show that the families in the areas near expanding industries experienced most migration from farms, but that the rates of migration from problem areas were very low.

These findings indicate that the rapid developments of the last year have not completely reversed the trends which were observable before



and that the war will <sup>not</sup> automatically correct many of the problems of low income farm families or the maladjustments of population to resources which have come to the attention of all who are concerned with rural affairs. Indeed there is one immediate and serious problem in the needs for resettlement of farm families displaced through the purchase of lands for war plants, contonments, artillery or bombing ranges, airports, and similar uses.

If it is correct that the rural problem areas still contain a considerable reservoir of persons who could be made available for agricultural and industrial employment in areas in which they can be more effectively employed - and the forthcoming inventory of the Nation's manpower will provide up to the minute information on this point - then the problem becomes one of recruiting, training and placement. It becomes a problem of guiding the movement of workers to those areas and occupations in which they can render the greatest service now during the wartime emergency, and of creating conditions which will fully utilize that manpower after the war has been won. To remove farm workers indiscriminately would intensify those local shortages which are a threat to the fulfillment of the part which agriculture must play. The apparent paradox of labor shortages in agriculture and a reservoir of manpower available in agricultural areas can be resolved by dealing not with the farm population as a whole, but with areas individually and by relating the persons living on farms to the job which agriculture needs to do.

A major element in this situation will be vocational training. The vocational training programs which are needed will of necessity deal with a large proportion of persons who have not completed the basic grammar school course; they will need to reach people who do not have ready access to high schools and the facilities for training which they afford; they will need to deal with people who have not had the everyday experience with mechanical equipment which is taken for granted in some farm areas. They will need to deal with individuals who have a deep distrust of schooling as such.

In the need for manpower we have removed from some of the more productive farm areas much of the trained manpower which was available there, because it was also trained in the skills which industry needed. It will be necessary to find and train workers to replace those who have already gone if agricultural production goals are to be met.

The educational process will need to be not only one for the potential workers from rural problem areas. It will need to deal also with the employers who may be unwilling to accept laborers who do not meet the high standards they were able to impose in a time when labor was plentiful. And it will require some education of communities which have discriminated against in-migrants on the basis of race, language, cultural backgrounds or levels of living.

Transferring ineffectively employed workers from farms and rural areas to occupations that will utilize their contribution more fully does not always necessitate the migration to other areas. The location of plants in areas which have reservoirs of available population is an important part of a program in the full utilization of the manpower of rural areas. No one wants to build places which will become ghost towns after the war.



But in many instances the location of a plant near a source of labor supply will mean drawing into employment workers who would be unwilling to undertake a long migration.

The Department of Agriculture has definitely taken the stand that it will cooperate with the United State Employment Service in meeting the needs for agricultural labor in some areas and the needs of persons in rural problem areas for jobs as well. Working through local committees of farmers and its various action agencies the Department keeps in touch with developments in all parts of the country, and has been in a position to make more effective the work of a number of specialized agencies. Some steps have been taken to guide the movement of workers to the places where their energies are most needed, through the development of camps and housing programs for migratory agricultural workers. Other efforts to stabilize the labor supply of areas which require a large volume of hired labor have been made. Through the local committees of farmers in all parts of the country the hoarding of labor in some areas can be discouraged and the more efficient utilization of the labor which is available can be encouraged. By directing attention to the labor reserved in rural areas, and by cooperating with agencies which are charged with the recruitment and training of workers for nonagricultural activities the Department can contribute to the war effort as a whole. Its primary job is in connection with the production of the food and fibers which are needed now - this can be done in such a way that a large number of persons who are now ineffectively employed in agriculture can be assisted in more efficient utilization of the manpower which they represent. These individuals can be made aware of the alternative opportunities, and can assist in the development of programs to utilize properly the land resources which thus become available.

The absorption of rural persons who are now unemployed or ineffectively employed into gainful employment is an important task now underway. If it is done at adequate wages with a recognition of the cultural backgrounds of the individuals and with provisions for economic and social security it can go far toward improvement of living conditions in depressed rural areas. It is important that at the same time a program to conserve and improve the soil resources of these areas be developed, in order to assure that the adjustments will be lasting, for usually these areas have been depressed when agriculture as a whole was prosperous as well as in times when agriculture as a whole was suffering from depression.

The decade from 1920 to 1930 was one of extensive migrations from farm to nonfarm areas. But this unguided migration did not evacuate rural problem areas on the scale which would have been necessary to bring about the desirable adjustments of resources and population. Such an adjustment did not occur during a period when urban industry was calling for large numbers of rural workers, and it was virtually impossible after 1930. The slowing down of migration away from some of the most depressed rural areas, coupled with a back-to-the-land movement in some places intensified the population maladjustments in rural areas. Poverty, low levels of living, meager educational facilities and a lack of free contact with the outside world and its opportunities have combined to create conditions which perpetuate the situation.

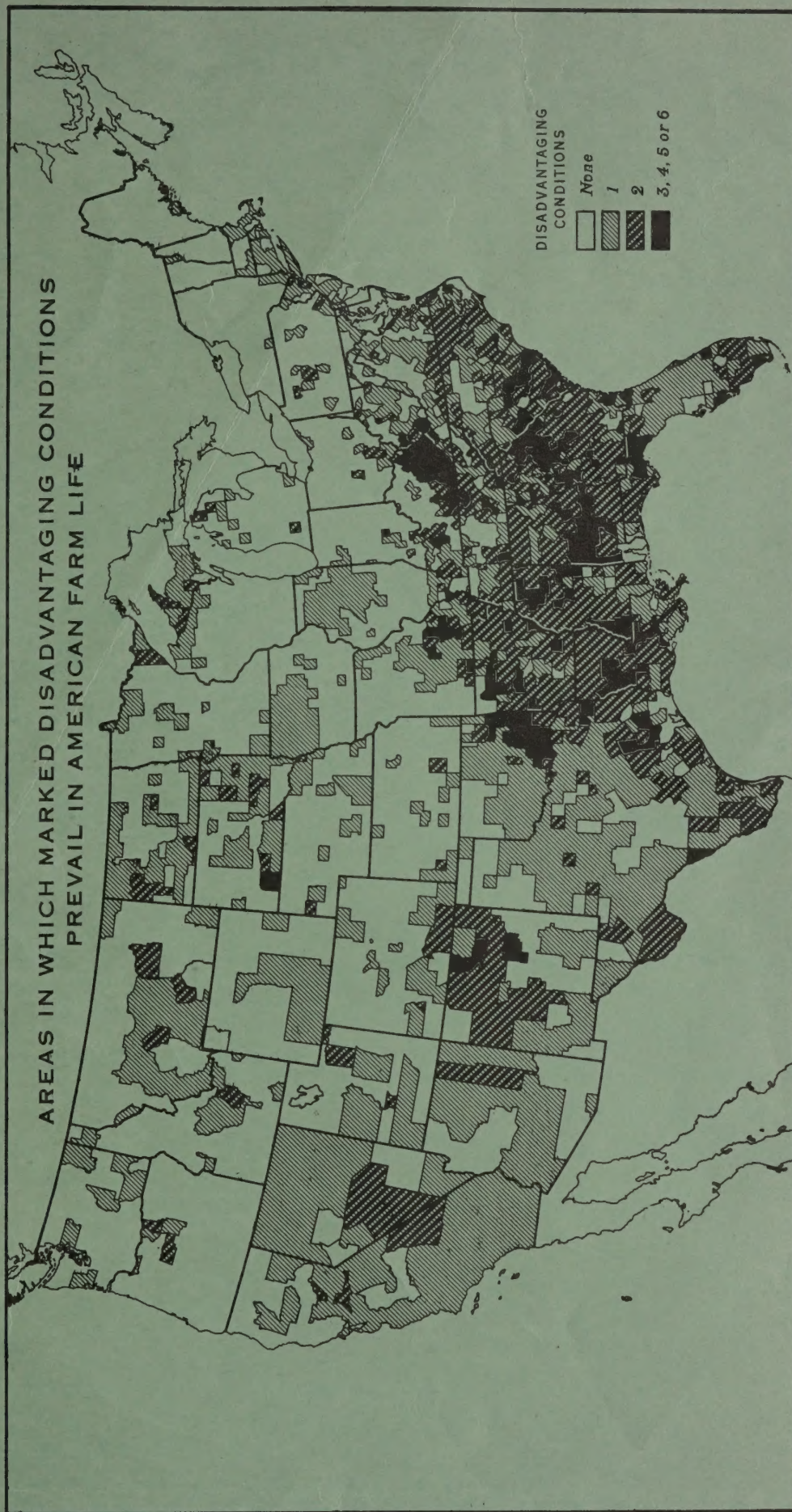


Migration has ordinarily been based on such information as the individual happened to get, but rarely did he have the opportunity to assure himself that the information was representative, reliable or adequate. Tips, hunches, rumors, and indefinite promises were often the bases upon which migration was started, and when they proved incorrect there often was a return migration or a further movement to another place concerning which the information was no more definite. The development of an adequate system for disseminating necessary information about employment opportunities among potential migrants would eliminate many of the difficulties now encountered by individuals who go to areas where their services are not needed.

More effective guidance of migrants to areas of greater opportunity is needed if the manpower of the nation is to be utilized fully in the present emergency. The nation at war cannot afford the wastes of ineffectively utilized manpower, or of indiscriminate migrations which delay the full utilization of its manpower.



AREAS IN WHICH MARKED DISADVANTAGING CONDITIONS  
PREVAIL IN AMERICAN FARM LIFE



DISADVANTAGING  
CONDITIONS

None
1
2
3, 4, 5 or 6



